

Notes on *Sturnella magna* in South America with a description of a new subspecies

by R. W. Dickerman

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Sturnella magna—the 'Eastern Meadowlark'—occurs in tropical, subtropical and temperate grasslands of northern South America: in Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Surinam and in northeastern Brazil. Chapman (1931) provided the last revision of the South American populations. He recognized 4 subspecies: *meridialis* (Bogotá, Colombia), *paralios* (Santa Marta Mountains, Colombia), *practicola* (northern Guyana lowlands) and *monticola* (Mt Roraima, Guyana = Venezuela). Phelps & Phelps (1963) included Venezuelan populations in *paralios*, recognized by Chapman as *practicola*. Blake (1968) combined *practicola* and *monticola*, using the latter name, although *practicola* has page priority. Haverschmidt (1955) in a footnote wrote "... the meadowlarks from Surinam belong to an undescribed race according to Zimmer (*in litt.*)", but he later (1968) used *monticola* for the Surinam birds without further comment. Unfortunately a copy of the letter from Zimmer is not in the archives of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH).

Recently while making an inventory of specimens from Venezuela in the AMNH, and before I had compiled the above history, I realized: (a) that there were 4 identifiable populations in Venezuela, and (b) that the series of specimens from northeastern Brazil represented a fifth taxa.

To resolve these problems, I obtained on loan paratypes and fresh-plumaged, near-topotypes of *paralios* and *practicola*, and additional specimens from Colombia and Venezuela. Only specimens in un-worn plumage (except for Surinam and Brazil) examined during this study, and those that had not been cited earlier by Chapman (1931), are listed below.

In brief, when specimens were arranged geographically, *meridionalis* and *monticola* were immediately recognised as distinct. Within the less-black series the Brazilian series was separable from the warmer-brown birds of the Rio Orinoco lowlands and in series was distinguishable from *paralios* of northern Venezuela and Colombia.

S. m. meridionalis and *monticola* are both dark subspecies with appreciably larger black areas in the dorsal feathers and in the barring of the remiges and rectrices. As noted by Chapman, *monticola* is considerably smaller than *meridionalis* and in fresh plumage it is much browner dorsally, especially on the crown. The range of *meridionalis* was accurately described by Blake (1968) "... Eastern Andes of Colombia from Norte de Santander southward (locally) to the head of the Magdalena Valley and northwestern Venezuela in the Andes of Tachira and Merida and Trujillo." *S. m. monticola* is restricted to the highlands of southeastern Bolivar, and adjacent Guyana.

The ranges of the 2 blackish subspecies are separated by the ranges of 2 smaller, paler subspecies. *S. m. paralios* is the slightly darker of the 2, with a greyer brown dorsum and a greyer nape. Specimens from the

Department of Hulia, Colombia, and from Venezuela average darker than birds from northern Colombia, but all are greyer-brown. In contrast, *practicola* has a warmer brown dorsum, and browner nape. Chapman (1931), in default of specimens from the northern lowlands of Guyana, used a series from Maripa on the lower Rio Orinoco to represent *practicola*. In fact that series, as well as other specimens from the Orinoco lowlands match well a paratype of *practicola*. The characters used by Chubb (1921) in the original description of *practicola*, namely smaller size, brighter coloration of the underparts and more white in the tail, are without value.

S. m. paralius occurs at medium and lower elevations in northern Colombia (south to Aguachica in the Magdalena Valley), with an atypically darker population in the Department of Hulia, eastward in the north to the savannas of northern and central Venezuela.

Zimmer's recognition of the Surinam population as representing a new subspecies must have been based to a large extent on the series from northeastern Brazil, as only 2 of 18 adults from Surinam are of any value for colour comparisons and even those are moderately worn. Those populations may now be known as:

***Sturnella magna quinta* subsp. nov.**

Holotype. ♂, AMNH 237404, Frechal, Rio Surumu, Amapa, Brazil; collected 10 September 1927 by T. D. Carter. Collector's number 208.

Diagnosis. Most similar to *paralius* in being greyer-brown (less warm) dorsally than *practicola*; the lateral crown and post-ocular stripes of males blacker as in *paralius*; auricular-area greyer than *practicola*; edges of secondaries and coverts greyer-brown than either of those subspecies. Much less black than *meridionalis* and *monticola*; much smaller than *meridionalis* (Chapman 1931).

Etymology. This is the fifth form to be named from South America.

Discussion. Two juveniles from Surinam are somewhat less rich dorsally than a comparable juvenile of *practicola* from Alta Gracia, Venezuela. The range of *quinta* is separated from the most similar subspecies *paralius* by the ranges of the very distinctive subspecies *practicola* and *monticola*.

Species examined:—

S. m. meridionalis. COLOMBIA. *Dept. Norte de Santander*: Ocana 6♂♂, 2♀♀; Pamploma 3♂♂. *Dept. Santander*: Angostura 1♂; Pena Blanca 1♂; Paramo San Pedro 2♂♂, 1♀; Las Ventanas 1♂; Hda. Las Vegas 3♂♂. VENEZUELA. *Dept. Merida*: Tabay 4♂♂; Azulita 1♂, 1♀; La Cuchilla 2♂♂.

S. m. meridionalis intermediate towards *S. m. paralius*. COLOMBIA. *Dept. Dinamarca*: La Holanda 2♂♂; Sopo 1♂. VENEZUELA. *Dept. Apure*: San Carlos del Meta 1♂.

S. m. paralius. COLOMBIA. *Dept. Magdalena*: Aguachica 7♂♂, 3♀♀; Camperucho 1♂; Hda. La Esperanza 1♂; San Sebastian 1♀ (paratype); El Manon 2♂♂. *Dept. Boyaca*: Palmar 1♂. *Dept. Hulia*: La Candela 3♂♂; La Plata 2♀♀. VENEZUELA. *Dept. Carabobo*: El Trompillo 2♀♀; La Cumbre de Valencia 1♂. *Dept. Lara*: Tocuyo 2♂♂; Cubiro 1♂, 1♀. *Dept. Trujillo*: Teta de Niquito 1♂. *Dept. Portuguesa*: Acarigua 2♂♂. *Dept. Aragua*: La Victoria 3♂♂; Colonia Tovar 2♂♂. *Dept. Yaracuy*: Nirgua 1♂.

S. m. praticola. GUYANA. Abary 1♀ (paratype); no locality 1. VENEZUELA. Dept. Bolivar: Maripa, Rio Caura 3♂♂, 1♀; Maipures 1♂; Alta Gracia 2♂♂, 1 juv.; La Mariquita 1♀, Dept. Anzoategui: Rio Suata 2♀♀.

S. m. praticola × *S. m. monticola*. GUYANA. Upper Takutu Mts. 1?♀; Annai, Rupununi River 1♂, 1♀; no locality 1. VENEZUELA. Dept. Bolivar: Cerro Upuima (= Cerro Upuigma Tepui) 1♀.

S. m. monticola. VENEZUELA. Dept. Bolivar: Cerro Roraima 2♂♂, 1♀; Cerro Ayuan-tepui 5♂♂, 1♀; Cerro Paurai Tepui 1♀; Cerro Ptari-tepui 1♂, 2♀♀.

S. m. quinta. SURINAM. Zanderij 8♂♂, 9♀♀, 2 juv.; "Interior" 1♀. BRAZIL. Estado Amapa. Type locality 5♂♂, 2♀♀; Lima. Rio Cotinga 2♂♂, 2♀♀; Porto Platon 2♂♂, 1♀.

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The avian genera *Tesia* and *Urosphena*

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Delacour (1942) defined the genus *Bradypterus* as follows: "Rictal bristles very small and inconspicuous; throat, breast, under tail coverts and lesser wing coverts sometimes plain, sometimes streaked or spotted; tail about equal to wing or longer; bill slight." He defined *Cettia* (differentiating it from *Bradypterus*) as follows: "Rictal bristles well developed and visible; no dark markings on the body plumage. Rectrices soft, never stiff nor with underlying barring, always 10 in number. Thickness of bill variable." He then divided the genus *Cettia* into 3 subgenera. The subgenus *Urosphena* was distinguished by "Tail shorter than wing by